DEATH AND FUNERARY CEREMONIES

The clothes which the man or woman wore when he or she died must be washed, and then a *fiḳīh* comes and recites passages from the Ḳorān, having the clothes close to him and one of his hands resting on them. He also recites over the place where the person died. If these precautions are not taken the *rōḥ* of the dead person cannot leave the house. When a child dies a hen is killed instead of an animal, the rest of the procedure being the same as on the occasion of the death of an older person.

I have given this information as it was repeated to me, but I

FIG. 51. STRING OF WAILING WOMEN IN A FUNERAL PROCESSION

fancy that it is really the *ʿafrīt* of the dead person that is meant in this statement, not the *rōḥ*, which is the soul, the *ʿafrīt* being the ghost, and quite separate from the *rōḥ*, according to the popular belief.[1]

The corpse is borne to the grave by four male bearers, who are constantly changed during the procession to the cemetery, for to assist in thus carrying the dead is considered a pious act, and he who performs it thereby acquires considerable merit. The funeral procession is headed by men, those who are relations walking as near as possible to the bier. Immediately behind the bier walk the female mourners (Fig. 51), their faces, hands, and arms dyed blue, and their heads, breasts, and arms plastered with mud; they hold handkerchiefs, usually blue or black, and sometimes green, which they wave in the air as they give vent to their piercing

[1] See below, pp. 237 ff.

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt
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THE FELLĀḤĪN OF UPPER EGYPT

Coptic saints receive the appellation Māri (Saint), and many of the beliefs and ceremonies associated with them are similar to those connected with the Muslim sheikhs.

A Coptic saint is usually buried within the precincts of a monastery or church, which may be dedicated to him. A popular saint may be honoured by the dedication of numerous monasteries and churches to his memory, in all of which he is equally venerated.

Sometimes the same saint may be claimed by Muslims and Copts alike, in which case the grave is often situated in an open space, possibly under the shadow of a tree or trees, the lower branches of which are covered with votive offerings contributed by the followers of both religions. With the Christians as well as with the Muslims candles are a favourite form of votive offering, and when the saint is claimed by the adherents of both faiths their candles may be seen burning side by side.

Many years ago, on a spot in the cultivation in Upper Egypt where a church dedicated to Māri Mīna el-ʿAgayebi now stands, there was a square plot of *ḥalfa*-grass. This site was claimed by the Muslims as the burial-place of a sheikh. There was a very poor man who lived in the town adjoining these fields and who acted as *farrāsh*[1] at the sugar factory in the same town. One night while he was sleeping he felt some one give him a kick. This naturally aroused him, and he saw standing beside him a man whose face and form were of great beauty, and who was clothed in white garments. This man told the poor *farrāsh* that he was Māri Mīna el-ʿAgayebi, that he wished him to build a church, and that he would himself indicate the spot on which he wished it to be erected. The saint told the *farrāsh* that he had called him to do this work instead of a rich man, as the latter would boast that by his riches he had built the church, whereas the saint himself would supply the poor man with all that he needed for the erection of the sacred building.

Māri Mīna then led the *farrāsh* to the patch of *ḥalfa*-grass in the fields, and told him to measure two metres from the edge of the *ḥalfa*-grass toward the east and two metres from the edge of the *ḥalfa*-grass toward the west. Then he was to dig the whole plot thus measured out to a depth of two and a half metres. When

[1] Literally, sweeper—the title given to servants employed by the Government to keep the Rest-houses clean, also to men employed in other public buildings in the same capacity.

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt
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he had done this he would first find a very deep well, and westward from this he would find a large quantity of bricks, enough for the building of the church; while to the east he would find piles of white lime to be used in the construction of the building. To the east again of the lime, if he dug down to the depth of half a metre, he would find a heap of money, sufficient to pay for the entire building of the church, including the wages of the workmen employed. The saint told the *farrāsh* that he was to start at once to build the church, and that if he disobeyed his orders he would be killed. Then Māri Mīna el-'Agayebi vanished.

The *farrāsh* set to work to dig up the plot indicated, and found everything as the saint had told him, including the well, which he discovered first.

The church still stands on this spot, but the old *farrāsh* who built it has, of course, been dead for a long time, and since his day the building has been enlarged by one of the Coptic bishops. The well is still to be seen within the precincts of the church.

Māri Mīna el-'Agayebi is a very popular Coptic saint, and he is venerated not only by the Christians, but also by many of the Muslims, who have, so I was told, the greatest faith in him, and who often appeal to him for aid in time of need.

Egladiūs el-'Azab is a saint of great repute. Several churches in Egypt are dedicated to him, and his body lies with those of four other saints in a special edifice set apart for them in a large town in Upper Egypt. The bodies of these five holy men are still in a good state of preservation, though they have all been dead for a long period of time. Each body lies in a coffin. Egladiūs el-'Azab was very young when he died, having been killed, so I was told, by the Arabs because he was a Christian. He wears a wide ribbon of gold across his breast, and a gold earring in one ear. A special festival is held every year in his honour, for the due celebration of which the people make large quantities of bread, and bring cattle, which are slaughtered at the churches. The bread and meat are distributed among the poor, who flock in great numbers on these occasions to all the churches dedicated to him.

In a certain village in Asyūṭ Province there is a Coptic church dedicated to Māri Egladiūs el-'Azab. A man who lives close to the sacred building was, on one occasion, entertaining a Muslim friend who had arrived from another province. While they were engaged in conversation together the talk turned on to the subject

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to be masculine, the Tambura feminine (19). Scant knowledge of the bands in Abyssinia forbids further discussion.

d. The sultans: As we have seen there are various groups of sultans in Egypt. In Abyssinia it is believed that living beings are haunted by former Gods degraded to a minor status. In the Sudan it is nearly the same as in Egypt with regard to local spirits, i.e. "Timsah" (crocodile) Turia, Nas-El-Gebal (Turia the people of the mountains) (20).

4. The ceremony: The method of determining the special spirits is different in Egypt and the Sudan. In Abyssinia and the Sudan the Kūdiya orders the musical band to play a special tune for every spirit and the patient sits quietly until she suddenly stands up and begins to dance. This is taken as a sign that the tune of the spirit has inspired and compelled her to dance. The ceremony itself is quite the same as in Egypt, including the demands of the spirits. In Abyssinia blood of the sacrificed animal is drunk. In the Sudan sweets and the bones of the animal are thrown into the river.

5. The Zar-language: There is a special Zar-language to which some Arabic words are added. It seems likely that the Zar-language is a combination of Amharic, Galla and Old-Aethiopian, the dominating language is, however, Amharic. (21)

The Zar, as we can see now, is either a very old practice and belief in the whole area of North-East Africa, or it might have come from Abyssinia. Basically it is formed on the fear of the unintelligible world /89/ and psychological phenomena; it satisfies the unseen powers by offerings. The violent and barbaric dance betrays a very strong African influence, especially the dominance of the

(19) Zenkovsky, S. Zar and Tambura in Omdurman. Sudan Notes and Records, vol. 31, part I, June 1950, p. 73

(20) Ibid, p. 70, and Trimingham J.S., Islam in the Sudan, Oxford 1949, p. 175

(21) Leslau, W. Ibid, p. 210

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drums and the cries uttered can be applied also in describing a war, 781
or another Central-African dance. 177

The Kūdiya is a real medicine man who is an incarnation 756
of the spirits. The sacrifices, the smearing of the body with blood, 782
the collecting of the bones of the sacrificed animal, the burying it in 791
the soil or throwing it in the river etc... are all elements of the art 177
practiced by any African tribe. In other words, this article could
have been called: "An African Element in Egypt."

The twofold and complicated Zar-conception of Egypt is 755
due to the Egyptian cultural type. Every belief of supernatural nature 177
was combined in the Zar, even Islamic saints were added to the list
of spirits and some Quoranic words are recited.

An important factor which is responsible for the survival of 755
such an interesting practice is that it offers an opportunity for women 182
gathering and dancing, for buying clothes and jewelry, and satisfying 562
some sexual urge.

Zusammenfassung.

Im heutigen Aegypten sowie in Abessinien und im Sudan spielt der Glaube an böse Geister eine bedeutende Rolle, namentlich unter den Frauen niedereren Standes. Die Geister gehen in die Körper ihrer Opfer ein und nehmen sie in Besitz. Nur durch die komplizierte Zar-Zeremonie können sie besänftigt werden. Die im Zar mitwirkenden Personen und ihre Funktionen werden eingehend geschildert: die Zentralgestalt Kudiya (meist eine Frau, nur selten ein Mann), einige Assistenten und Musiker und schliesslich die Geister selbst. Die Untersuchung enthält auch eine Reihe von Hinweisen auf Altägypten.